

“A MAGNIFICENT TRIUMPH”

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

Theme: Knowing how it all ends sustains us through the difficult times in life.

Introduction: There are times when even the most godly become discouraged and sometimes even depressed. Paul had gone through a very low valley – knowing oppressive discouragement. He had been virtually run out of Corinth on his last visit, prompting him to write the uninspired letter to them known as the “**Lamented Letter.**” He was greatly vexed after he sent it, wondering how the Corinthians might react. He knew it would either cause repentance and willingness to deal with Paul’s antagonist in Corinth, or they would side with the antagonist against Paul and, in doing so, against God. Paul described himself as possessing “anguish of heart” in 2 Corinthians 2:4 – “*For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.*” He also declared that he was comforted by the God “*who comforts the depressed*” in 2 Corinthians 7:5-6.

In our text tonight, we see some of the perspectives God’s Spirit provided to Paul that enabled him to work through these things and find affirmation and joy. He addresses 1) The Hindrances as We Struggle, 2) the Hope as We Serve, and 3) the Honesty as We Share. All of this demonstrates the truth that “**Knowing how it all ends sustains us through the difficult times in life.**”

I. The Hindrances as We Struggle – 2:12-13

A. The Opportunities for the Spirit – v. 12

1. Paul continues to share his heart with the Corinthians – speaking of the very deep concern he had for them after he had written to them so harshly.
2. Before he had been able to receive word on how they had responded, he was vexed in spirit.
3. He shares, “**Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord...**”
 - a) Apparently, at this point, Paul had to leave Ephesus because of the riot – cp. Acts 20:1.
 - b) This is what “**a door was opened for me in the Lord**” refers to, the fruitful preaching of God’s Word for seven days – cp. Acts 20:6.
 - c) He preached “**the gospel of Christ**” all night long – the story of Eutychus.

4. However, despite the opportunities God had provided, Paul was so vexed over the situation at Corinth that he had to make his way toward where he could meet Titus.

B. The Oppression of Our Spirit – v. 13

1. He states, *“I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother,”* who was supposed to bring him word about the Corinthians’ response to Paul.
2. *“rest” [ἄνεσις]* – refers to the relief from something onerous or troubling – he was “worried” about them.
3. It became so dominating in his mind that the open door wasn’t enough to keep Paul in Troas – *“... but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.”*
4. He couldn’t wait any longer – he had to connect with Titus – cp. [2 Corinthians 11:28](#).
5. There are times when our spirit becomes distressed over matters – relationships, finances, jobs, family, and a host of other concerns that can distract us from even basic spiritual disciplines.

II. The Hope as We Serve – 2:14-16

A. The Thankfulness for Grace – v. 14a

1. Paul speaks about what he did to overcome his distress – *“But thanks be to God ...”*
2. The very first solution to discouragement or depression is to consider all that God has done for us.
3. Gratitude for God’s grace is a tonic for the soul – it brings focus and context to our problems – cp. [2 Corinthians 1:3](#).
4. We cannot allow our focus to remain on our circumstances or feelings but on the objective observations of God’s faithfulness to us in the past – cp. [Philippians 4:6-7](#).

B. The Triumph of Grace – v. 14b

1. He not only reflects on how God has already displayed His faithfulness to him but also on what God has committed Himself to do through Jesus Christ.
2. He continues, *“who always leads us in triumph in Christ ...”*
3. A *“triumph” [θριαμβεύω]* – refers not merely to individual victories of concern but to a glorious military parade awarded to

conquering generals whom Caesar desired to honor.

- a) *They had to have been that commander on the field during the victorious battle or war, completely subjugating a foreign enemy;*
- b) *They had to have been able to certify that over 5,000 of the enemy had been slain;*
- c) *They had to have extended the territory of the Empire;*
- d) *They had to have obtained spoils to bring back to present to Caesar.*

4. It refers to a procession that included trumpeters, spoils, models of conquered citadels and ships, a white bull for sacrifice, captive officials and military leaders, musicians, and priests swinging censers with sweet-smelling incense. Then came the general, who was honored, followed by his family and friends.
5. In this sense, we are the family and friends who follow – ***“who always leads us in triumph in Christ.”***
6. This “triumph” began with the ascension of Christ and continues even to this day – cp. ***Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 4:8-10.***
7. Regardless of setbacks and discouragements, the believer’s triumph in Christ Jesus is certain—the parade we are in has already started with the Lord's ascension.

C. **The Testimony of Grace – vv. 14c-16a**

1. As in the ***“triumph”*** in Rome, the ***“triumph in Christ”*** includes an aromatic fragrance that honors the Lord – ***“... and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.”***
2. As we testify of grace through our lives lived by grace, the aroma of Christ and “the knowledge of Him” are made available ***“in every place.”***
3. Additionally, Paul states, ***“For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and those who are perishing ...”***
4. It is to the Lord we are striving to be ***“a fragrance of Christ”*** – to allow our lives to be conformed to Christ and thereby be pleasing to God – ***2 Corinthians 5:9; Colossians 1:10.***
5. Both ***“those who are being saved and those who are perishing”*** have the ability to smell the ***“fragrance of Christ”*** –

- a) For **“those who are perishing ...”** is the **“an aroma of death to death ...”** – meaning there would be judgment – even as in the **“triumph”** in Rome when the captured and condemned participated in the parade on their way to execution.
- b) For **“those who are being saved,”** it is **“an aroma from life to life”** – a reference to those who have spiritual life in Christ and will enjoy eternal life in glory.

D. The Trust in Grace – v. 16b

- 1. Then Paul acknowledges that the only way we can have a testimony of grace that wafts of the aroma of Christ is by grace – **“And who is adequate for these things?”**
- 2. The effort to represent Christ with natural human abilities is useless; human resources are inadequate to influence people for eternity – cp. **2 Corinthians 3:5.**
- 3. It is only by God’s grace that we can be conformed to the image of Christ – cp. **1 Corinthians 15:10.**

III. The Honesty as We Share – **2:17**

A. The Selfish Peddling of God’s Word

- 1. Those who were disturbing the faith of the saints, drawing men away from Christ and after themselves, were guilty before God against whom Paul contrasts himself – **“For we are not like many, peddling the word of God.”**
- 2. **“peddling” [καπηλεύω]** – a term that describes a con artist who sells cheap imitations of genuine items – never buy a watch of the arm of a salesperson who has options – regardless of if they look authentic!
- 3. These “peddlers” were offering the promise of life when they were delivering death – cp. **2 Timothy 3:5; 2 Peter 2:17-18.**

B. The Sincere Proclamation of God’s Word

- 1. On the contrary, the man of God is one **“... as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.”**
- 2. Not everyone who claims to be preaching God’s truth is actually doing so.
- 3. However, there are those who are genuine – who teach the Word faithfully **“in the sight of God.”** – cp. **2 Timothy 4:1-2.**

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